

would declare that Sir Arthur Sullivan in his lighter pieces was similarly blessed."

When a musician gives to the world a great opera, he has done a big thing. In the producing of what is termed good drawing-room songs the musical public is served in a different way. A great many of the composers are prolific writers. We think of Arthur Tate, Hermann Loehr, Jack Thompson, W. H. Squire, Jack Trelawny, Liza Lehmann, d'Harde- lot, del Riego, Dorothy Forster, the late Noel Johnson and others who each have many successful works to their credit. And when it comes to lyrics for the songs the same thing applies. One of the most frequently seen names in this connection, whose words are used by various musi- cians and publishers is that of Ed. Teschamacher.

Life Among the Serbians

Serbia is, or rather was, the land of primitive things and primitive beliefs. Poverty and simplicity are everywhere visible in the homes of the peasants. Their houses are of the simplest. Some of the dwellings are built of adobe and thickly whitewashed, most of them show the brown mud which has been plastered upon a basketwork of willows. Roofs are everywhere constructed of reeds, or willows laid side by side very thickly, with the fluffy Hungarian grass as thatch. All the houses, even of the well-to-do peasants, and often of the middle class, are of one story and of only one or two rooms. They are set well back from the road and in a yard usually surrounded by sheds and pig and cow houses.

A visit to the house of even a wealthy grain raiser shows the narrow border- land between dearth and sufficiency in Serbia.

It is a little two-roomed dwelling built of adobe and whitewashed. At each corner of the house appears a stripe of blue and in the centre of each wall a design in blue is painted. About the windows another geometrical pat- tern in red takes the eye. In the liv- ing room a fire is burning on the earthen floor on a raised hearth. Close by is the oven, also of clay, with bread baking in it. Having got rid of the many and fiercely barking dogs that are much interbred with wolves, one takes off his boots at the threshold and enters. In the home itself the men go about in their stockings, minus boots or shoes, and the women with naked feet.

A great copper kettle hangs over the everlasting fire of corncoals and in it are leaves and twigs boiling slowly so as to yield their purple dye for household purposes. In an earthenware jar, cracked and scorched on its outside with the heat, a savorious stew of pork, beans, potatoes, gourds, pepper pods and capsicum is simmering. Plates of coarse white ware, blue pitchers, lamps and wooden platters are displayed on the mantelshef of the great open chimney. The walls of the room are red-ochred and covered with thousands of flies. In a corner a shelf supports the large tin and earthenware pans with wooden covers for holding stores, etc., together with other utensils. In the tall cup- board hard by the entrance to the cellar under the kitchen there stand innum- erable bottles and demijohns of plum wine and brandy, arrack, vodka and all sorts of home-made liquor. In it a little shelf holds the candles which the folk burn at the altar by way of devo- tions. Behind the living room lies the bed room with its great wooden bed and blue walls.

When the house is to be built, the proprietor does not consult any archi- tect. Having chosen a piece of ground for the purpose, he puts on it several lumps of rock or large stones. If in the morning a frog or other living small thing is found when these are lifted, the site is regarded as satisfactory and building is begun. Even the presence of a worm is sufficient to the rural Serbian to bring luck to his new house.

The attitude of the average Serbian toward death is that it is merely a con- sequence of Nature. They keep their coffin boards in their lofts and a barrel of strong plum wine, which is as strong as any alcohol, in the cellar, to be drunk at the funeral by the survivors, who usu- ally then indulge in a feast. There is a strong belief among all Serbians that

more than two deaths in one year will follow in the same family if a black cock be not buried alive with the second corpse. Until the funeral has taken place, it is not etiquette to eat or to drink or to do any housework. And, as the Serbian peasants believe that the soul of the dead person remains in the house for some twenty-four hours after death, a loaf of bread and a bottle of plum wine or of spirits are placed on the table of the room in which the deceased expired, and remain there until the coffin is lowered into the grave. A coin is also thrown down on to the coffin lid before the soil is turned in, so that the departed shall not enter the other world empty-handed.

During the first twelve months of mourning the women of the household pay five visits to the grave. Until the year is over they must neither sing nor wear flowers. Five feasts for the soul of the departed are also held during the twelve months, the guests always bring- ing their own food with them. Any- thing that is left is afterward distri- buted among the poor at hand.

But Christmas in Serbia, that land of

pigs and plum wine, and poverty, has a ritual of customs deemed of the great- est importance. The native word for Christmas Day is "Bojich," which means "The Infant God;" and its celebration begins early on the previous morning. Almost immediately after dawn two of the youngest of the family go out into the nearest forest or woodlands, and carefully cut down a small oak. To bring good luck it is requisite that the tree falls toward the east. If through miscalculation or carelessness, it falls toward the west, misfortunes are to be expected during the coming year. Two logs are then sawn off the oak, one of them larger than the other. These are termed the "Baduyak," and have to be kept burning from midnight on Christ- mas Eve. When the baduyak is put into the fire on the open hearth the thicker end which sticks out is smeared with honey very thickly and on Christ- mas morning, as soon as the family are all up they greet each other over the baduyak with endearments and the best of wishes for next year.

Roast pig takes the place of turkey as the principal Christmas dish. It is

cooked about four in the morning, and, as it is the custom to fast on Christmas Eve, every one falls to very heartily. But no one ever thinks of eating a mouthful until the first Christmas vis- itor has arrived to greet the family. This individual is known as the "Polozuik." On entering the house, he walks up to the hearth and strikes the baduyak a blow, saying, as the sparks fly out, "May you have this coming year just as much good luck, prosperity, progress and happiness as you wish." He then embraces the family, each one, across the burning log and is kissed in turn by all present. Prayers are offered up by the head of the house. After this the roast pig is put on the table, to- gether with stuffed gourds and roasted onions, and the feasting begins, it may be truthfully said to continue all day.

One wonders how many of Serbia's traditions and customs will pass in this war of Armageddon. Already her losses throughout her four years of almost constant fighting have exceeded 54 per cent of her male population and some 28 per cent of the women and children.

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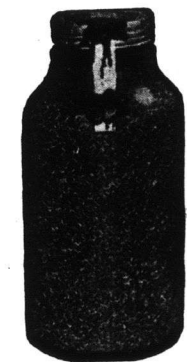
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